

## **2001 Annual Report Executive Summary**

### **Mid-Delta Empowerment Zone Alliance**

The best way to describe 2001 is: Nothing Is Permanent, All Is Change. As we reflect on the accomplishments and failures of 2001, we have found that every attempt has been made to address the economic and social problems that plagued the Mississippi Delta with its declining economical demographics. The Mid-Delta Empowerment Zone Alliance {hereafter known as MDEZA}, its Commissioners, and staff have worked diligently to distribute the \$40 million Social Service Block Grant awarded to promote substantial improvements in the six (6) counties that is the framework of the empowerment zone. We are proud to report that MDEZA has distributed to its sub grantees through the Mississippi Development Authority, \$17,726,866.96 to enable the sub grantees to make the kinds of improvements in the empowerment zone by following the benchmarks, which has been a guideline for tracking the disbursement of funds. To be more specific, the Commission has approved \$8,822,515.83 for Bolivar County; \$3,330,887.45 for Holmes County; \$2,240,313.28 for Humphreys County; \$4,357,966.86 for Leflore County; \$2,074,342.22 for Sunflower County, and \$3,962,517.26 for Washington County. The total amount awarded to the six (6) counties that makes up the empowerment zone is \$24,788,542.90. MDEZA's total allocation is \$30,038,542.90. In order to understand the impact MDEZA has had on the Delta, one must know that the empowerment zone has awarded \$15,388,857.00 for economic development, \$1,830,218.00 for housing, \$4,146,620.34 for social service programs, otherwise known as general, and \$3,422,847.56 for sub zone. Since the Delta region is still plagued by high unemployment, the Mississippi Empowerment Zone has made a substantial impression on the economy by attracting numerous industrial plants, promoting self-entrepreneurship and community capacity building. The area of economic development continues to be MDEZA's thriving point.

It wouldn't be fair not to mention the criticism MEDZA has faced in 2001. Consequently, this led MDEZA to answer very clearly the criticism that was made against it by upgrading the policies and procedures for funding and allocation. MDEZA's Grant Solicitation Manual states that staff is required to review an application in seven (7) days; then forward to the Mississippi Development Authority and the United States Department of Agriculture/Rural Development, who also have fifteen (15) days to review an application and then submit their findings to the executive director. The executive director then submits the proposal to the Economic Development Committee or Project Evaluation Committee in order to recommend to the full Board its status, pass or failure. Staff has found this new process to be easier and faster because it allows sub-grantees' proposals to be funded more rapidly.

Due to changes in the process of reporting information on projects, county-wide meetings were held to discuss and to enhance the relationship between MDEZA and citizens of the zone for both educational and informational purposes. Town hall meetings were also held to explain changes in the administrative process and constitutional changes made by the board. The month of August set precedence for the remainder of the year. The Board of Commissioners also held its annual retreat. The guest speaker for this retreat was Patricia Hoben Moore, District Coordinator, Mississippi Department of Housing and Urban Development. She challenged each organization, the Mid-Delta Empowerment Zone Alliance, One Stop Capital Shop, University Center for Economic and Community Development, and the National Center for Excellence to work together collectively in order to meet the needs of all the people living in the six (6) counties. Arthur B. Peyton